

**Before the
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
Washington, D.C. 20554**

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In the Matter of)	
)	
Affordable Connectivity Program)	WC Docket No. 21-450
)	
Emergency Broadband Benefit Program)	WC Docket No 20-445
_____)	

COMMENTS OF MICROSOFT CORPORATION

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I. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Microsoft Corporation (‘Microsoft’) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments to the Affordable Connectivity Program (‘ACP’) Report and Order (‘Report and Order’) and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (‘Further Notice’).¹ Microsoft commends the Commission for proposing actions to increase awareness and participation in the ACP by eligible populations.

Microsoft’s mission is to empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more. Through our Airband program and digital equity initiatives,² Microsoft works through partnerships with various internet service and device providers, big and small, to facilitate access to affordable broadband and affordable devices to those who need them, and to digital skilling. In partnership with Starry, Inc., affordable broadband access is being made available to underserved and income-insecure residents of public housing in Los Angeles, Detroit, and other cities.³ We have observed firsthand the need to make available access to affordable broadband, affordable devices, and digital skilling for those living in these settings, and the challenges for doing so. Our comments focus on the Commission’s proposal to launch a pilot program focused on expanding ACP participation by beneficiaries of Federal Public Housing Assistance (‘FPHA’) programs.⁴

¹ In the Matter of Affordable Connectivity Program, WC Docket No. 21-450, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (rel. January 21, 2022).

² [Airband: The initiative to bring the internet to everyone – On the Issues \(microsoft.com\)](#).
[Addressing racial and digital inequity - Microsoft On the Issues](#).

³ [Tech companies step up to bring free Wi-Fi to L.A. public housing residents - Los Angeles Times \(latimes.com\)](#); [Starry and Microsoft Bringing Low-cost Broadband to Under-connected Detroit Communities - DBusiness Magazine](#).

⁴ See Further Notice at ¶282.

The ACP reflects changes that Congress made to the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program (‘EBB Program’) in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (‘IIJA’).⁵ The EBB Program was transformed from an emergency program designed to respond to a public health crisis to a longer-term broadband affordability program.⁶ Under the ACP, among other things, eligible households can receive discounts on the cost of broadband service and connected devices. The Report and Order noted that while there are large numbers of households in public housing that would benefit from the ACP, “[w]e recognize that only a small share of FPHA beneficiaries enrolled in the EBB Program.”⁷ Justifiably, the Commission is seeking ways to ensure that a much larger percentage of the households in FPHA programs that are eligible to enroll and benefit from the ACP can do so.

One way the Commission is seeking to increase enrollment in the ACP is through a pilot program that is focused on increasing the participation of FPHA beneficiaries. To increase enrollment of FPHA beneficiaries in the ACP, the pilot program should increase awareness of the ACP amongst FPHA beneficiaries, make it simple for FPHA beneficiaries to learn whether they are eligible to enroll in the ACP, and lower the barriers for FPHA beneficiaries to receive technical assistance, if necessary, to enroll.

Specific actions the Commission can take to intensify outreach to FPHA beneficiaries and lower barriers to ACP enrollment include: (1) entering into an interagency agreement with the U.S. Department of House and Urban Development (‘HUD’); (2) creating a standardized toolkit in multiple languages that can be used by local governments, local housing authorities, and non-profit

⁵ Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, Pub. L. No. 117-58, 135 Stat. 429, div. F, tit. V, § 60502 (2021).

⁶ See Report and Order at ¶1.

⁷ See Further Notice at ¶271.

organizations to support educational and enrollment efforts; (3) leveraging the public engagement conducted at the state and local levels to implement the IIA programs administered by U.S. Department of Commerce National Telecommunications and Information Administration (‘NTIA’), and (4) in conjunction with HUD, reaching out to the population in HUD’s transitional housing programs.

II. THE COMMISSION SHOULD ENTER INTO AN INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT WITH HUD

At the Federal level, HUD funds and administers several housing and community development programs. Participants in HUD housing programs may be eligible to participate in the ACP. These include individuals and families receiving: (1) rental assistance in the form of Section 8 certificates or vouchers for low-income residents; (2) public or subsidized housing for low-income individuals and families; and (3) homeless assistance provided through local communities and faith-based and other non-profit organizations.⁸

Low-income households seeking to participate in HUD’s assisted housing programs apply through their local public housing agencies, which are city- or county-based. HUD provides funds to state and local governments, and to non-profit organizations to assist homeless individuals and families. The funds are used for helping the homeless move from the streets to temporary shelters and from temporary shelters to transitional housing. Funds can be used to provide supportive services.

An interagency agreement between the Commission and HUD will allow FCC to leverage HUD’s administrative infrastructure to communicate information regarding the ACP program

⁸ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *Programs of HUD: Major Mortgage, Grant, Assistance, and Regulatory Programs 2020*, <https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/Main/documents/HUDPrograms2020.pdf> , HUD web site visited on March 15, 2022.

throughout its 10 regions, to each state’s HUD office, and in turn, to local housing authorities.

With an interagency agreement in place, HUD can signal to its staff through performance agreements, awards, incentives, etc., that increasing ACP enrollment by eligible FPHA beneficiaries is an agency goal.

For example, the local housing authority can mail FCC developed ACP outreach toolkit materials to individuals accessing HUD’s FPHA programs. The mailer can include information about the ACP program, guidance on how to qualify and enroll, contact information for local digital navigators or others designated to assist with enrollment, and guidance for accessing more information and seeking assistance online.

III. THE COMMISSION SHOULD HAVE A STANDARDIZED ACP OUTREACH AND ENROLLEMENT TOOLKIT IN MULTIPLE LANGUAGES TAILORED TO FPHA BENEFICIARIES

The Commission should create a standardized ACP toolkit that includes information about the program and enrollment process tailored to FPHA beneficiaries. The toolkit should be made available in both electronic and paper formats. The targeted audiences are the staff at the local housing authority; FCC consumer experts; non-profits, other organizations, digital navigators and “outreach partners,”⁹ providing information and support to FPHA beneficiaries on the ground, and the FPHA beneficiaries themselves.

The toolkit should be available in multiple languages as the population the ACP is seeking to enroll includes non-English speakers and those for whom English is not their first language. The toolkit needs to include a step-by-step guide for enrolling in the program. The Commission’s ACP

⁹ Federal Communications Commission, [Affordable Connectivity Program / Federal Communications Commission \(fcc.gov\)](https://www.fcc.gov/affordable-connectivity-program), visited March 15, 2022.

website¹⁰ is a great start and will only need limited additions to include materials tailored for FHPA beneficiaries. Other collateral materials that should be developed includes a mailer that can be sent by the local housing authority to its FHPA beneficiaries as described in Section II, and posters that can be featured prominently in public housing communities.

IV. THE COMMISSION SHOULD LEVERAGE OUTREACH FOR COMPLEMENTARY IIJA PROGRAMS

The IIJA authorized Digital Equity Act programs administered by NTIA. The Digital Equity Act Programs include the State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program, State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program, and Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program. Combined, these programs will advance digital inclusion and promote digital equity, so that "individuals and communities have the information technology capacity that is needed for full participation in the society and economy of the United States."¹¹

Populations covered under the Digital Equity Act include: (1) individuals living in households earning at or below 150 percent of the poverty line, (2) veterans, (3) aging individuals, (4) incarcerated individuals (with some exceptions), (5) individuals with a language barrier, (6) individuals with disabilities, (7) individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group, and (8) individuals who primarily reside in a rural area.¹² There is overlap between the covered populations of the Digital Equity Act programs administered by NTIA, FHPA beneficiaries, and individuals eligible for enrollment in the ACP.

¹⁰ Federal Communications Commission, [ACP Consumer Outreach Toolkit / Federal Communications Commission \(fcc.gov\)](https://www.fcc.gov/ACP/ConsumerOutreachToolkit), visited March 15, 2022.

¹¹ Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, Pub. L. No. 117-58, 135 Stat. 429, div. F, tit. III, § 60302(10) (2021).

¹² *Id.* at § 60302(8).

Under the Digital Equity Act programs, state and local housing authorities are eligible to be the state's 'administering entity,' or more likely, be part of the state's 'administrative entity' partnership that can be formed by each U.S. State, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.¹³ Microsoft recommends that the Commission, through its interagency agreement with HUD and relationship with NTIA, works to ensure that a public or multi-family housing authority will have the opportunity to be included in any 'administering entity' partnership formed in a state, the District of Columbia or Puerto Rico.

Even though the Commission administers the ACP, it is clearly a critical part of the overall national Digital Equity effort. State digital equity plans created in compliance with implementation of the Digital Equity Act should include actions to increase ACP participation of eligible individuals and households. NTIA is holding a series of webinars on these programs throughout the spring. The Commission should seek to participate in the scheduled webinars to discuss the ACP, describe how it advances digital equity, present its toolkit, and discuss the pilot program to increase ACP awareness and enrollment among eligible FPHA individuals and households.

V. PILOT SHOULD REACH OUT TO HUD'S TRANSITIONAL HOUSING PROGRAMS

Conceptually, individuals and households living in transitional housing, including housing provided through HUD funding programs, should be able to enroll in the ACP. The ACP can be viewed as a supportive service for assisting individuals and households that have recently experienced homelessness back on their feet. In order to efficiently enroll eligible individuals residing in transitional housing into the ACP program, we recommend empowering the entity managing the transitional housing facility to facilitate enrollments. Again, this could be included

¹³ *Id.* at § 60304(b)(2) and § 60305(b).

in the HUD/FCC interagency agreement and HUD could make it part of the grant condition for the following fiscal year. The services made available to these populations while at the transitional housing facility should be made portable so they can take the ‘benefit’ with them to their permanent address. Subsidized hardware should also be made available and taken with them to their permanent address.

VI. CONCLUSION

Microsoft applauds the Commission’s broad efforts to increase ACP awareness and enrollment amongst eligible populations. The Commission recognizes that there is an overlap between the eligibility criteria for FPHA programs and the ACP. The proposed pilot program seeks to leverage this overlap in eligibility criteria. Microsoft suggests that the Commission can make an increased number of FPHA beneficiaries aware of the ACP by leveraging HUD’s administrative infrastructure through an inter-agency agreement, leveraging NTIA’s outreach efforts for the IJA programs it administers, and creating a standardized and easy to use ACP toolkit that can answer questions about the ACP and provide a step-by-step guide for enrolling FPHA beneficiaries.

Respectfully submitted,

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